



June 8, 2007
For Immediate Release
gtimmons@tnc.org

Contact
Grady Timmons, (808) 587-6237
The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i

New Report Makes Strong Case for Protecting Hawaii's Coral Reefs

Honolulu, Hawaii – A compelling new report showcases the incredible biological, cultural and economic value of Hawaii's coral reefs, but warns that in the main Hawaiian Islands these "rainforests of the sea" are in urgent need of protection.

"The good news is that coral reefs are resilient," said Kim Hum, Director of Marine Programs for The Nature Conservancy of Hawai'i. "If we act in time, we can still restore this priceless natural asset. Returning our reefs to health is essential if we are to create a sustainable future for our islands."

Titled *The Living Reef*, the 20-page illustrated report is being released in conjunction with World Ocean Day, June 8th. The report is a project of The Nature Conservancy and the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, with funding provided through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Coral Reef Conservation Program.

Hawaii's coral reefs and nearshore waters are home to some 7,000 marine life forms, a quarter of them found nowhere else on Earth. Hawaii's cultural traditions and island way of life are intimately tied to its reefs, which contribute more than \$350 million annually to the State's economy, or about \$1 million a day.

"Coral reefs provide Hawaii's people with countless benefits – from the fresh fish we eat, to the surf we ride, and the beaches we enjoy," said Dan Polhemus, Administrator for DLNR's Division of Aquatic Resources. "They also serve as nature's breakwaters, protecting us from the destructive power of the sea. In more ways than we might realize, our island lifestyle depends on our coral reefs."

Yet despite their enormous importance, Hawaii's coral reefs are a natural legacy in jeopardy – threatened by run-off, sedimentation and marine debris, the introduction and spread of invasive species, destructive fishing practices, recreational overuse and the specter of climate change. These threats have so damaged Hawaii's coral reef ecosystems over the past century that nearshore fisheries have declined by more than 75%.

“Like any living system, coral reefs suffer from prolonged exposure to disturbance and stress,” the report notes. “If the threats are not removed, a reef becomes susceptible to invasion, disease, fragmentation, and even death. This is already happening in the main Hawaiian Islands. With a resident population of 1.3 million and more than 7 million visitors arriving annually, there are just too many people trying to get what they want out of the same limited natural resource.”

To protect Hawaii’s marine resources and ensure a sustainable future, *The Living Reef* proposes six proven measures for restoring coral reefs:

1. Return to the traditional Hawaiian way of catching only what is needed using responsible fishing practices.
2. Invest in effective sewage treatment facilities and an integrated system for preventing other land-based sources of shoreline pollution.
3. Increase funding for community-based near shore marine management.
4. Increase funding and staffing for marine resource enforcement.
5. Adopt the recommendations of the 2003 State Aquatic Invasive Species Management Plan to ensure prevention, early detection, and rapid response to invasive aquatic species.
6. Create nursery areas that will allow fish to grow to full maturity and reproduce at a rate that exceeds the rate of extraction.

To view or download *The Living Reef*, visit The Nature Conservancy’s website at nature.org/hawaii. An electronic version of this press release can be downloaded by visiting the news section at nature.org/hawaii

###